

CHINA IN AFRICA

An AFRICOM Response

Commander Todd A. Hofstedt, U.S. Navy

The recent expansion of Chinese activity in Africa has raised several concerns, ranging from control over energy resources to exploitive economic practices and support of rogue or corrupt regimes, perpetuating instability and undermining international pressure for reform. These issues, however, represent only a fraction of China's broadly based engagement in Africa. In fact, the most egregious examples of China's behavior commonly cited are unsustainable and even counterproductive to its long-term interests in Africa. China's involvement is thus evolving, as government and ever more influential business interests in that nation recognize the advantages of political and economic stability in Africa. These interests support U.S. security objectives in Africa, encouraging more effective governance and mitigating grievances against the status quo. Consequently, in the furtherance of its mission "to promote a stable and secure African

environment," the newly established U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) would do well to support the productive, responsible activities of Chinese actors in Africa.¹

In its inaugural white paper on Africa, *China's African Policy*, issued in January 2006, China identified its "general principles and objectives" as "Sincerity, friendship and equality"; "Mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity"; "Mutual support and close coordination"; "Learning from each other and seeking common development"; and "The one-China principle . . . [as] the political foundation for the

Commander Hofstedt is a submarine officer and a March 2009 graduate of the College of Naval Warfare at the Naval War College. He is currently undergoing training en route to assignment as a deputy at Submarine Squadron 16. Previous assignments include duty aboard USS Santa Fe (SSN 763), USS Tennessee (SSBN 734), and USS Dallas (SSN 700), and at Strategic Systems Programs. He holds a bachelor of science degree in naval architecture from the U.S. Naval Academy, a graduate certificate in public financial management from American University, and a master of science degree in astronautical engineering from the Naval Postgraduate School.

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establishment and development of China's relations with African countries."² The somewhat nebulous nature of these "objectives" (with the exception of the One-China principle) and the fact that they were intended for an international audience necessitate the examination of China's actual activities with respect to Africa in order to assess the practical meaning of these objectives and the degree to which they have been achieved.

CHINA'S ACTIVITIES IN AFRICA

Chinese involvement in Africa is broad both geographically and in nature. Of the fifty-three countries in Africa, China maintains official diplomatic relations with all but Burkina Faso, São Tomé and Príncipe, Gambia, and Swaziland, which maintain official relations with Taiwan.³ Those four states excepted, China has an embassy and ambassador in each of the African nations but Somalia (due to security issues), and all except Comoros maintain embassies in Beijing.⁴ Moreover, official contacts include frequent high-level visits by President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao, and numerous ministers, particularly the foreign minister, whose first foreign visit each year since 1991 has been to Africa.⁵ In a November 2006 summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China hosted political leaders from forty-eight African states, including forty-one heads of state or government.⁶ (Founded in 2000, the FOCAC meets annually, with summit-level talks every three years.)⁷ China is also actively engaged with the African Union (AU), pledging \$100–\$150 million for the construction of a permanent headquarters and attending AU summits in 2006 and 2007.⁸ The chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, Jean Ping, commended China in January 2009 for its contributions to Africa and identified China as Africa's key strategic partner.⁹ In February 2009, China dramatically broadened its diplomatic support for Africa at a plenary session of the UN General Assembly, during which the Chinese ambassador declared: "In the reform of the Security Council, priority should be given to the greater representation of developing countries, in particular African ones."¹⁰

Perhaps the most visible manifestation of Chinese activity in Africa is economic. China has provided considerable development aid, in the form of low-interest loans, including thirteen billion dollars to Angola, nine billion to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and \$2.5 billion to Ethiopia.¹¹ This is on top of 10.5 billion yuan (\$1.3 billion) in debt relief provided to twenty-seven African countries between 2000 and 2003 and an additional ten billion yuan in debt cancellation for thirty-three African countries announced in 2006.¹² China also contributes to the African Development Bank, hosting the bank's annual meeting in May 2007, in Shanghai.¹³ Additionally, China is a member of the West African Development Bank, has signed agreements with the East African Development Bank and with the Eastern and Southern African Trade and

Development Bank, and is engaging the Economic Community of West African States, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and the South African Development Community.¹⁴

China-Africa trade in recent years has grown dramatically, from forty billion dollars in 2005 and \$55.5 billion in 2006 to seventy billion in 2007 (when China, overtaking Britain and France, became Africa's second-largest trading partner) and an anticipated excess of \$100 billion in 2010, at which point it would surpass the United States to become Africa's single largest trading partner.¹⁵ In fact, this target was achieved two years early, with trade in 2008 reaching \$106.8 billion, despite trade actually declining in December as the global financial crisis intensified.¹⁶ This is particularly noteworthy given that the rate of Africa's export growth to China (exceeding an average of 40 percent annually) and import growth from China (exceeding an average of 35 percent annually) are both considerably higher than the rate of growth in either world trade (14 percent) or commodity prices (18 percent).¹⁷ China's balance of trade with Africa has shifted from a surplus of \$940 million in 2007 to a deficit of \$5.16 billion in 2008.¹⁸ China has expanded the list of duty-free imports from Africa from 190 to 440 items and is discussing a free-trade agreement with the Southern Africa Customs Union.¹⁹ Trade relations are further fostered by "commercial counselor offices in 40 African countries and seven consulates-general in five of them."²⁰ Despite the common perception of Chinese exploitation of African natural resources, Chinese trade is actually no more exploitive than that with the West: "The similar composition of goods traded between Africa and its main trading partners suggests that the recent surge in Africa-China trade largely reflects the comparative advantages of each partner, given their stage of economic development, rather than any unilateral interest by China in exploiting natural resources."²¹

While still relatively small, Chinese direct investment in Africa is growing and diversifying. Though published values vary considerably, as late as 2007 China had invested, by one measure, thirteen billion dollars in Africa, primarily in extractive industries, about six billion of that in the oil sector of Sudan alone.²² In October of that year, however, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China purchased a \$5.6 billion stake (representing 20 percent) in the Standard Bank Group of South Africa, Africa's largest bank.²³ By 2005 China had established over eight hundred enterprises in Africa, and in 2006 it announced plans for a five-billion-dollar China-Africa Development Fund to promote African investment by Chinese firms.²⁴ Additionally, "special economic zones" have been created to provide Chinese firms preferential "incentives, tax breaks, and reliable power services to mitigate investment risk" and to "link disparate and fragmented African producers and markets in China."²⁵

Though frequently criticized in the West, Chinese economic aid is very popular in Africa, since its unconditionality (the sole prerequisite being acceptance of the One-China principle) respects sovereignty, in regional eyes, and avoids the protracted negotiation process that, in contrast, can significantly delay the receipt of aid from the West.²⁶ Africa thus sees China as a valuable alternative to the West, whose aid it also perceives as frequently paternalistic and as tending to impose Western values.²⁷ Moreover, Nigerian officials, for example, despite “certain reservations about Chinese intentions,” have noted that “collaboration with the West . . . had left Africa impoverished despite half a century of aid.”²⁸ China also funds high-profile projects that provide tangible benefits, including projects eschewed by Western donors for their difficulty.²⁹

In particular, Chinese, like African, leaders generally favor infrastructure projects, while Western donors prefer to avoid them.³⁰ Chinese firms complete them less expensively than their Western counterparts and have a reputation for rapid completion and acceptable (if not Western-level) quality.³¹ Chinese firms have also proved more tolerant of financial and security risk, going into areas of conflict and instability generally avoided by Western companies, thereby facilitating a greater range of operations.³² Technology transfer from these projects is generally more readily exploitable for African users as well, since their technological gap with respect to China is much smaller than that with the West.³³ Finally, a number of Chinese companies are electing to remain in Africa after the initial projects that brought them there have been completed, indicating their perception of ongoing economic opportunity and making them readily available for follow-on projects.³⁴

The current global economic crisis and its concomitant decline in commodity prices have raised questions about the future direction of Chinese economic involvement in Africa. Some observers believe an economic retrenchment—if not retreat—is under way, citing the fact that in the last two months of 2008, over sixty Chinese mining firms departed the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and more than a hundred left Zambia.³⁵ They also point to the inactivity associated with the 2007 offer of several billion dollars in loans to the DRC, the repayment of which was to be partially based on copper-mining concessions.³⁶ Resource-based loans to Guinea and Gabon are experiencing similar delays.³⁷

A broader view, however, discredits this conclusion. First of all, the possible waning of Chinese interest is not the only factor impeding the DRC loan package; Western donors have threatened to withhold relief from the DRC’s eleven-billion-dollar foreign debt if the DRC does not renegotiate the terms of the Chinese financing.³⁸ In the case of Guinea, the December 2008 coup and its

associated political instability undoubtedly created concerns about both the physical security of Chinese investment and, more fundamentally, whether agreements with the current sitting government will have lasting economic and diplomatic value.³⁹ Second, though many small private Chinese mining firms are leaving Africa, large state-owned mining firms are expanding in Africa to take advantage of the low commodity prices.⁴⁰ “Mining executives say that with no need to answer to shareholders, many state-backed companies can take a long-term view on the country’s demand for metals.”⁴¹ Examples include Jinchuan, which has acquired a nickel mine in Zambia; the China Non-Ferrous Metals Corporation, which is opening a copper-smelting plant in Zambia; and China Union, which has signed a contract to mine iron in Liberia.⁴² Third, President Hu personally visited Africa as recently as February 2009, meeting with leaders in Mali, Tanzania, Senegal, and Mauritius.⁴³ This trip followed January visits by China’s foreign minister, Yang Jiechi, to Rwanda, Uganda, Malawi, and South Africa, and the commerce minister, Chen Deming, to Kenya, Angola, and Zambia.⁴⁴ Finally, China has affirmed that despite the global economic crisis, it will fully satisfy all commitments it made at the 2006 FOCAC.⁴⁵ Additionally, in just the first two months of 2009, China announced agreements with thirteen African countries totaling over \$15.9 billion in new loans and grants.⁴⁶

Beyond these burgeoning financial relationships, China is expanding its training and educational assistance to Africa, of which there is a long history; such aid almost doubled in the 1990s.⁴⁷ China maintains educational relationships with fifty African countries and convened a Sino-African Education Minister Forum in 2005.⁴⁸ More African students now attend school in China than ever before (5,900 in 2007), most on Chinese-government-provided scholarships.⁴⁹ China has pledged to “double the number of such scholarships by 2011,” “build 100 rural schools in Africa by 2009,” and “establish 10 agricultural technology centers.”⁵⁰ Between 2000 and 2003 China trained six thousand African professionals in such fields as agriculture, medicine, engineering, and education, and from 2004 through 2006 China claims to have trained 14,600 more.⁵¹

In addition to providing training, the Chinese Ministry of Health is developing “a long-term Chinese health strategy for Africa,” one that includes “collaboration with the international community.”⁵² Approximately a thousand Chinese medical professionals (over half of them senior physicians or surgeons) are currently working in thirty-eight African countries.⁵³ At FOCAC in 2006 China pledged, by 2009, to “build 30 hospitals . . . [and] provide about \$40 million in grants for anti-malarial drugs, prevention, and construction of model treatment centers.”⁵⁴ Having already constructed a number of hospitals in Africa, China is planning to build ten more, as well as thirty malaria clinics, in the next three years.⁵⁵

China's political presence in Africa is also growing but is in many ways less pervasive and less sophisticated than its economic presence. The International Department of the Communist Party of China maintains relationships "almost exclusively with ruling parties in one-party dominated states," eschewing with few exceptions (most notably South Africa's Democratic Alliance) interaction with "opposition parties for fear it will disturb its relationship with the government in power."⁵⁶ China has established four Confucius Institutes in Africa (with eight more to be completed soon), to teach the Chinese language, history, and culture, and to "promote an understanding of its view of the world."⁵⁷ Xinhua, China's state-run news agency, maintains offices across Africa, not only to report news but to gather information for the government.⁵⁸ Xinhua also trains African journalists, both in Africa and in China; a recent two-week seminar in China drew more than forty attendees from thirty African states.⁵⁹ A specialized China African News Service was launched by Xinhua in December 2007.⁶⁰ Interestingly, the Chinese press center distributed at the November 2006 FOCAC the book *China and Africa 1956–2006*, which presents democracy "as a scourge because it 'exacerbates' tensions inside African countries"; "Fortunately," the work observes, "the wave of democratization has started weakening."⁶¹

By comparison to both the economic and political, China's military ties in Africa are rather underdeveloped and static. Though China maintains security relationships, of some sort, with all forty-nine African countries with which it maintains diplomatic relations, it stations only between nine and fourteen military attachés in Africa and has never conducted a joint military exercise with an African state.⁶² The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has, however, trained military personnel from at least eighteen African countries and established exchange agreements with twenty-five.⁶³ Almost 1,500 Chinese military personnel (primarily observers, engineers, police, and medical and transportation personnel) support seven of the eight United Nations peacekeeping operations in Africa, exceeding those of any other permanent member of the UN Security Council.⁶⁴ Some have criticized China's failure to provide substantial combat forces for actual peacekeeping, but deployment of support personnel may reflect a conscious policy to demonstrate support for Africa without appearing militarily threatening.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the emphasis on engineering and medical assistance is consistent with aspects of China's economic involvement. China also provides financial support to the African Union to support peacekeeping in Darfur and Somalia.⁶⁶

China ranked third in arms exports to Africa from 2003 to 2006, behind Germany and Russia, providing approximately 15.4 percent (\$500 million) of total sales to the continent.⁶⁷ Though relatively small in magnitude, the destinations

of arms shipments have drawn international criticism. China has become not only Zimbabwe's leading arms supplier but its second-largest trading partner.⁶⁸ With Zimbabwe under sanctions by both the United States and European Union (EU), China sold it fighter aircraft, air-defense systems, military vehicles, radio jamming equipment, and electronic surveillance gear.⁶⁹ In the case of Sudan, Chinese assistance in establishing three weapons factories has undermined the effectiveness of a UN arms embargo.⁷⁰ China also provided arms to both sides in conflicts between (and within) Ethiopia and Eritrea.⁷¹

The expansiveness of this activity appears consistent with the objectives stated in *China's Africa Policy*, though the broad wording of that document could be interpreted as encompassing virtually anything. Although there are few consistent themes from which to infer more precise intentions, the diversity of the engagement is in itself suggestive and, taken together with what few themes there are, indicates at least some of the specific objectives being promoted in Africa.

CHINESE OBJECTIVES

From these diverse activities, then, a handful of fairly concrete objectives in Africa can be deduced: ensuring access to natural resources, expanding export markets, enhancing China's prestige as a rising global power, and protecting its international freedom of action.⁷² These theater-level strategic objectives support China's national strategic objectives, which in turn are driven by a domestic political need for economic growth and social stability:

Economic development rather than military supremacy is the primary objective for China's international engagement for a host of reasons—not the least of which are to raise the living standards of its enormous population, to dampen social disaffection about economic and other inequities, and to sustain regime legitimacy after the demise of communist ideology as an acceptable organizing principle.⁷³

Rapidly expanding Chinese interest in African natural resources, particularly oil, has driven much of the recent international concern regarding China's activities in Africa. China currently imports one-third of its oil from Africa; Angola now surpasses even Saudi Arabia as China's leading supplier.⁷⁴ However, despite this considerable growth, China still only imports 9 percent of Africa's total oil production, compared to 33 percent exported to Europe and 32 percent to the United States.⁷⁵ Also, China's per capita oil consumption is only 7.4 percent of that of the United States, though economic growth in China will certainly drive significantly higher consumption over time.⁷⁶ Most of the worry about Chinese acquisition of sources of supply appears to ignore the fact that China's tremendous economic growth, coupled with its massive foreign currency reserves, will

put it in an increasingly better position than virtually any other country to buy oil on the world market, whatever the ownership of the source. Nevertheless, “Beijing would like to secure this supply through ownership and investments, partly to avoid the price and supply uncertainty associated with buying such commodities on spot markets. These resources are deemed critical for Beijing to maintain the country’s economic growth.”⁷⁷ Moreover, unless China exhibits some elasticity of demand—that is, unless assurance of access alters consumption—Chinese use of oil from national investments overseas would reduce demand on global markets by an equivalent amount, yielding no net change. To the extent that China opens new sources of oil (such as in Sudan), global supplies actually increase. Most telling, perhaps, is the observation that “although approximately half of China’s equity oil production worldwide comes from Africa . . . , the majority of that equity production is not shipped to China but sold on the world market.”⁷⁸

The comprehensive Chinese approach to economic development in Africa, focusing on infrastructure and increased diversification and encompassing training, education, and medical care, strongly suggests a balanced and long-term approach to promoting African economic growth. This is consistent with recognition that considerable growth in African economies over an extended period of time will be required if Africa is to overcome its tremendous poverty and generate the economic resources necessary for a substantial long-term Chinese export market. Whether this ongoing expansion into new markets is driven by a saturation of Chinese domestic markets or merely by the desire to supplement them is a subject of debate, but in either case the ability of expanded exports to foster economic growth while generating foreign currency reserves remains unquestioned.⁷⁹ In this manner, not only is economic growth supported (both current and long-term), but future access to the natural resources required for sustained performance is facilitated as well.

Manifestations of China’s aspirations for global prestige take many forms, but perhaps the most obvious is the consistent demand that the People’s Republic of China be accepted as the one and only China, of which Taiwan is only a subordinate province. This sole condition is imposed on virtually all diplomatic and economic relations between China and the countries of Africa, and it has proved remarkably effective: currently only four African countries recognize Taiwan, down from over twenty in the early 1990s.⁸⁰ Economically, China’s emphasis on high-visibility projects not only ingratiate itself with African leaders but also culminates in lasting public testaments to Chinese largess and engineering prowess.⁸¹ “If the growth in its power is to proceed unhampered over time, China will have to make its presence felt beyond its immediate environs.”⁸²

If it is true that “to the extent that China may exploit its soft power for strategic ends, it is to forestall possible ‘containment’ rather than to pursue expansion,” ensuring freedom of action can be seen as fundamentally linked to China’s myriad activities in Africa.⁸³ Strategically, legal ownership over sources of widely traded global commodities is largely irrelevant to a country able to outbid virtually any competitor in the global marketplace—*unless* a hostile international community colluded to impose mechanisms restricting sales to China. Similarly, aggressive expansion and development of export markets in Africa tend to forestall a catastrophic loss of trade should the West for any reason collectively elect to restrict Chinese trade.

In pursuit of sustainable economic development, China also is seen to have placed a priority in keeping stable and relatively tension-free relations with its primary export market, the United States, and with other countries and regions. . . . [E]ven the appearance of a more overt pursuit of its regional and global interests could prompt the United States and other countries to strengthen their alliances or form other groupings to counterbalance and deter China’s international outreach. Such a development in turn could fetter China’s economic growth.⁸⁴

In addition to protecting crucial elements of sustained economic growth, freedom of action is also intrinsic to the other perceived prerequisite to the continued rule of the Communist Party of China: its ability to impose social order domestically. This implies an international community in which national sovereignty is accepted as preempting international standards of human rights. According to *China’s African Policy*, China would, for African states accepting the One-China principle, “coordinate positions on major international and regional issues and stand for mutual support on major issues concerning state sovereignty, territorial integrity, national dignity, and human rights.”⁸⁵ Such a policy has manifested itself through Chinese activity in the UN Security Council in support of Sudan and Zimbabwe.⁸⁶ Since African states constitute over one-fourth of the UN General Assembly, courting their favor can yield substantial international clout, and it has already proved advantageous to China: “African states have been pivotal in preventing Taiwan from joining the World Health Organization and in tabling a condemnation of Chinese human rights practices at the U.N.’s Commission on Human Rights.”⁸⁷

The current global economic crisis raises questions about the sustainability of Chinese engagement in Africa. In the event of prolonged global economic stagnation, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will likely experience increasing pressure to redirect resources from African development to domestic development so as to assuage discontent stemming from rising unemployment and stalled improvement in living standards. However, while segments of the

Chinese population may resent the continued provision of foreign aid during a period of domestic need, the CCP will likely resist any major reductions, as it appears to recognize that its diplomatic clout will contribute to Chinese influence in shaping the eventual postcrisis global economic framework. In a February 2009 speech delivered in Tanzania, President Hu announced his desire to “deepen cooperation with African countries in such multilateral organizations as the UN and the World Trade Organization to address global challenges like climate change, food security, poverty alleviation and development. We also hope to participate jointly with them in developing international economic, financial and trade rules and pushing forward the international economic order in a fair and just manner.”⁸⁸ Realizing this ambition would support, at least to some extent, all four of China’s objectives in Africa.

Viewing Chinese activities in Africa in terms of these four principal objectives provides a useful framework within which to devise an appropriate theater-level response. However, inconsistencies between the long-term consequences of some actions and the objectives being sought become immediately apparent and require consideration.

COMPLICATIONS FOR CHINA

Though seemingly in the ascendant, China’s pursuit of its objectives in Africa has become increasingly problematic, in that many of its activities are undermining achievement of its own long-term objectives. Several Chinese economic practices, for example, are significantly degrading China’s popularity and threatening its long-term economic access. Heavy reliance on imported Chinese labor despite generally high unemployment among indigenous populations has drawn widespread criticism. Also, Chinese indifference to workers’ rights does little to encourage recruiting or retention and instead has led to several highly publicized incidents.⁸⁹ In September 2002, a fire at a Chinese-owned factory in Nigeria killed at least thirty-seven Nigerians “after a factory foreman reportedly locked the building doors”; in early 2008, striking Chinese workers clashed with police in Equatorial Guinea, resulting in two deaths and several injuries.⁹⁰ An explosion at a Chinese-owned copper mine in Zambia in April 2005 killed over fifty people and led to demonstrations amid accusations that safety regulations had been ignored.⁹¹ Anti-Chinese sentiment in that country reached such a level that opposition to the Chinese presence became the primary issue in the opposition campaign for the presidency in September 2006; five months later, President Hu “was forced to abandon plans to visit the ‘Copper Belt’ due to fears that the workers would revolt again.”⁹²

Another major economic issue raising widespread local ire is the undercutting of the market for local manufactured goods by the importation of

inexpensive products from China, particularly textiles.⁹³ In 2004, shopkeepers in Senegal protested against Chinese businesses, setting several on fire and prompting the president to suspend virtually all further issuance of visas to Chinese citizens.⁹⁴ The closure of uncompetitive local textile mills in several African countries, including Nigeria and South Africa, has incited protests and, in 2007, prompted the South African president to warn that Africa was in danger of becoming a Chinese colony.⁹⁵ Other economic complaints include the cancellation of, or failure to complete, several major projects and concerns that construction quality is not up to Western standards and may prove inadequate over time.⁹⁶ Also, in 2006, Gabon suspended a Chinese firm's oil drilling operations "due to its environmentally unsafe practices."⁹⁷

Chinese military support to rogue regimes has also created friction between China and several African countries. A shipment of arms and ammunition intended for Zimbabwe in April 2008, in the midst of a disputed presidential election in that country, met with "the refusal of dockworkers in South Africa to offload the arms for overland shipment to Zimbabwe. The president of Zambia publicly criticized the shipment while the governments of Mozambique, Namibia, and Angola refused to allow the arms to be offloaded for transshipment to Harare."⁹⁸

With Chinese attention focused on African heads of government and the political and business elites that support them, China makes correspondingly "little effort to cultivate Africans affiliated with civil society, labor unions, non-governmental organizations, opposition political parties, etc."⁹⁹ By largely isolating itself from local public opinion, China appears to exhibit a disregard for its significance until damage has already occurred. Ironically, as noted above, China is interested enough in public opinion to establish Confucius Institutes throughout Africa to promote its worldview but not enough to make an effort to understand public opinion before attempting to change it. Overall, "China seems to have difficulty maneuvering in countries more democratic than itself."¹⁰⁰ A prime example of this clumsiness is an assertion in the *People's Daily* of 30 December 2007 that Kenya was unsuitable for democracy and that its imposition by colonial powers was to blame for the postelection violence in that country—accusations immediately denounced by Kenyan media and civic organizations.¹⁰¹ All of these diverse affronts to public opinion seriously jeopardize the prestige and influence sought by China in Africa.

Perhaps the greatest contradiction between current activities and long-term objectives lies in China's exploitation of conflict and rogue regimes. Though some observers claim, for example, that "China wants to keep political risks high enough to ensure that Chevron, Total, and Shell—companies that once had operations in Sudan—do not jump back in," such instability precludes

development of a robust market for its own exports and ultimately threatens Chinese investment and access to resources.¹⁰² Chinese oil facilities in both Ethiopia and Sudan have been attacked by rebel forces; the Justice and Equality Movement in Sudan is specifically attempting to expel the Chinese for their support of the Sudanese government.¹⁰³ Furthermore, activity perceived as perpetuating or exacerbating instability diminishes China's prestige both in Africa and globally.

Also complicating a sustained prioritization of short-term political objectives is the ever-broadening range of Chinese actors and interests involved in Africa.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, resolution of conflicts between these diverse groups, particularly between government policy objectives and business profit incentives, is hindered by bureaucratic barriers.¹⁰⁵ In addition, direct government influence is waning, as "trade, investment, and other commercial activities combined have outpaced official development assistance (ODA) and become dominant in financial terms."¹⁰⁶ Despite an increase in annual ODA to Africa from \$310 million in 1989–92 to \$1–\$1.5 billion in 2004–2005, the ratio of ODA to trade dropped from 20 percent to 3–4 percent over the same period.¹⁰⁷ This growth in trade and investment will create an increasingly powerful influence favoring long-term political and economic stability over short-term political opportunism.

Finally, successful economic growth and development, such as that fostered by Chinese activities, effectively makes such African countries less beholden to China. "Ironically, because of early help from the Chinese, Luanda may now have the means to avoid getting trapped in a relationship with a partner as voracious and demanding as China."¹⁰⁸ Moreover, African leaders are beginning to exploit China, offering contracts to China not with any intention of fulfilling them but rather to induce desired Western partners into offering more generous terms.¹⁰⁹ Niger, for example, successfully used such a strategy in negotiating uranium rights with a French company.¹¹⁰

Exploitive economic practices that generate political opposition and diplomatic approaches that favor one country over the combined opposition of the others in the region are clearly contrary to both the broad, stated objectives and the more specific, deducible objectives of China in Africa. In fact, they jeopardize China's political influence and economic access. At the same time, barring an event that generates a strong nationalistic response in China, the growing economic influence of both Chinese businesses and recipient countries will increasingly marginalize China's ability to act for purely political purposes. This fortuitous confluence of diverse factors creates a tremendous opportunity for AFRICOM to leverage Chinese initiatives in the furtherance of its own objectives.

A RECOMMENDED AFRICOM RESPONSE

Most of the literature examining China's involvement in Africa recommends coordinating aid, training, and other forms of assistance between China and Western donors so as to maximize its effectiveness in Africa. However, such recommendations are merely theoretical, in that they fail to address complications associated with practical implementation; most of all, they do not consider Chinese interests. Not only does the United States not control China, but it has very little direct influence over China, since deference to U.S. interests would undermine China's highly prized autonomy and prestige. Potentially, direct pressure applied to China could even be counterproductive, as China may feel obligated to take an opposing stance so as to avoid even the appearance of acquiescence to U.S. demands.

Therefore, China must be indirectly influenced by shaping the environment in such a way that its actions taken to advance its objectives simultaneously support American interests. Fortunately, a stable, secure Africa is in the long-term best interest of not only the United States and Africa but China as well. Recent political missteps aside, China's attainment of its objectives in Africa ultimately depends on a stable, secure environment for trade and the reliable flow of critical resources.

Consequently, Africa Command would do best not to oppose or undermine Chinese activities in Africa. Pressuring countries to choose between the United States and China would be a losing proposition: first, the United States would not always win (and where the United States did not win, its influence would decline precipitously, while that of China would rise proportionately); second, where the United States did win, China would be encouraged to subvert the system (if not the local political system, at least the existing international order); and third, since many African states favor ties with both China and the United States, such an action would create resentment and send the message that the United States was not really interested in supporting Africa, only in countering China, likely resulting in a sweeping reduction in U.S. influence across the continent.¹¹¹ At the same time, any attempts to impede Chinese activities or access would be seen by Beijing as highly threatening and would likely provoke it to adopt a stance subversive of the established international order if not outright hostile to the West. Conversely, because Chinese economic growth shows little, or even negative, correlation with that of the United States (or of the West as a whole), significant trade with both the United States and China could moderate economic cycles in Africa, thereby improving economic stability and thus contributing to political stability.¹¹²

Accordingly, even in cases of destructive or disruptive Chinese behavior, AFRICOM would appear well advised to avoid confronting Chinese actors

directly (particularly unilaterally) but rather to support the desired local responses of affected states and regional organizations. In other words, the most fruitful approach for Africa Command would seem to be not attempting to inhibit China from taking actions that degrade China's own influence and interests but in allowing them, while supporting the regional response to those actions—without usurping local leadership or imposing narrow U.S. interests.

In the context of Africa, however, China has shown increasing willingness to work with the international community. China has contributed to the International Monetary Fund–sponsored African Capacity Building Foundation, and in November 2004, it worked with the UN Development Program to establish the China-Africa Business Council.¹¹³ Though China likely would not want to work directly with the United States, or probably even the EU, because it would not want to be (or be seen as) a junior partner, responsible Chinese initiatives should be publicly praised and supported wherever possible. The greater China's incorporation into the international community, the less it will need to maintain ties with rogue regimes, the more it will see the value of complying with accepted norms of international behavior, the more it will benefit from a stable international environment, and therefore the more likely that China will oppose destabilizing activities, in its own interest. China would simply have no reason to ignore or subvert an international system of which it was a major beneficiary and on the verge of becoming a significant leader. With China embracing stability, rogue African regimes will have few alternative sources of support and therefore experience greater pressure to reform. Recent moderation of Chinese stances toward Sudan (including persuading the government to accept an expanded UN presence and pressuring the government to alter its behavior and negotiate a solution to the conflict in Darfur) and Zimbabwe (including prohibiting Robert Mugabe's attendance at the 2008 Olympic opening ceremony and pressuring him to negotiate with the opposition Movement for Democratic Change) may indicate growing Chinese recognition of its evolving role in the international community.¹¹⁴

The recent, well publicized deployment of Chinese warships to the Gulf of Aden to counter the piracy threat, however, only superficially demonstrates participation in multilateral approaches to Africa. Fundamentally, these operations only tangentially address Africa's problems; they primarily serve to help secure Chinese commerce (primarily imports), though the Chinese warships have escorted, and responded to distress calls from, several foreign vessels.¹¹⁵ These operations may also be reflective of both an emerging expeditionary capability and growing fear of a burgeoning Indian sea-denial capability in the Indian Ocean.¹¹⁶ Finally, while this deployment does indicate a willingness on the part of China to take on new roles in the region, it also appears to indicate a

preference for independent action vice incorporation into existing Western-generated constructs, such as Combined Task Force (CTF) 151, with which the Chinese exchange e-mail but have expressed no interest in joining.¹¹⁷ This is consistent with both the value the Chinese place on autonomy and their desire to eschew any position that could cause them to appear subordinate to the West. Moreover, such a deployment enables China to demonstrate great-power status and prestige through its willingness and ability to act unilaterally and operate independently. Thus, China is unlikely to be particularly receptive to U.S. overtures for joint action.

There is, however, a potential exception: were the United States publicly to request that China take the lead on a particular issue of interest to Africa, China would be under substantial pressure to do so. Such an approach could be politically palatable to China, since the United States would be publicly treating China as a great-power peer vice a subordinate or a second-class power. More important, Chinese refusal of such a request could be seen as an abdication of global and regional leadership, as well as a lack of concern for Africa's problems, resulting in a significant degradation in influence regionally and globally. Obviously, this approach would have to be applied sparingly, so as to retain its impact and prevent the appearance of American abdication of leadership.

Local threats to Chinese influence in Africa appear to have sparked in China emerging recognition of the value of moderating its behavior toward the continent. In his February 2009 speech in Tanzania, President Hu declared, "The Chinese government encourages and supports the competitive Chinese businesses to invest in Africa, create more jobs for the local people, increase technology transfer to the continent and urge[s] them to shoulder greater social responsibilities and live in harmony with local communities."¹¹⁸ Diplomatically, growing realization of the threat to its economic interests, combined with international pressure, particularly from the AU and Chad, convinced China essentially to play the "good cop" to the rest of the world's "bad cop" toward Sudan.¹¹⁹ This approach earned China praise from Andrew S. Natsios, former U.S. special envoy to Sudan, and Jendayi Frazer, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, and proved broadly advantageous to China: "It increased its moral influence, reassured its partners in Africa and the West, safeguarded its oil empire in Sudan and uphold [*sic*] its prerequisite of sovereignty and state consent."¹²⁰ Similarly, it was African pressure (especially from Ethiopia) that prompted China to propose a peacekeeping mission in Somalia to the UN Security Council in 2006.¹²¹ China, declared President Hu in his Tanzanian speech, will "play a constructive role of settling conflicts and hot issues and maintaining peace and security in Africa."¹²²

Of course, there is no guarantee China will act in its own long-term best interest. However, should China refuse to remain productively engaged in Africa,

it will likely forfeit prior investment; jeopardize its own export market; betray its indifference to the states and people of Africa, costing itself international support; and effectively hand regional leadership to the West. The resulting sacrifice of economic strength and global prestige would be a considerable loss for China, and in that regard it may well serve as an incentive for China to continue along its current path of increasingly productive involvement.

Supporting responsible Chinese initiatives in Africa, however, does not mean abdicating theater leadership to China. Africa Command can actively promote American influence by demonstrating the benefits of American goodwill at the continental, regional, national, and local levels. Instead of previous approaches that alienated Africa by narrowly emphasizing counterterrorism and democracy building at the expense of local needs, recognition of the common long-term objectives of stability and security would further the AFRICOM mission while bolstering the American reputation in Africa by focusing on Africa's own priorities.¹²³ For example, the African Union's need for training, equipment, and financing is substantial, between its "massively under-resourced" Peace and Security Council and its request for international support to "stand up" an African Stand-by Force ("five regional brigades with rapid deployment capability").¹²⁴ Africa Command can provide or arrange for this support, possibly through the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance program (ACOTA).¹²⁵

Africa Command should also push to have administration of ACOTA transferred from the State Department Bureau of African Affairs. Replacing the current State Department civilian-contractor training staff with AFRICOM military personnel would not only allow continued training in peace enforcement and counterinsurgency skills but would also provide additional avenues for advancing U.S. security interests in Africa. In particular, this expanded military-to-military contact could be employed to enhance local military professionalism (with special emphasis in the areas of ethics, international law, and respect for civilian authority) and to develop rapport, cultivating positive, productive, and lasting working relationships with U.S. military personnel.¹²⁶ AFRICOM should then actively maintain these relationships to evaluate the effectiveness of the training provided and identify measures to improve its training program, to recognize when additional specialized training might be beneficial, and to facilitate coordination between AFRICOM and local military forces during a domestic crisis or regional peacekeeping operation (whether the United States is formally participating or not).¹²⁷ This broadened engagement would better improve African operational effectiveness and military professionalism while enhancing AFRICOM's credibility and influence.

Though extensive formal collaboration with China is unlikely, at least over the near term, Africa Command should attempt to work closely with all the other major actors in Africa. First of all, the command should leverage its European Command origins to facilitate coordination with EU initiatives and thereby garner European support while improving effectiveness and preventing redundancy. Second, AFRICOM should develop mechanisms to allow effective coordination with—and support for—both UN institutions and UN peacekeeping missions in Africa, whether or not the United States is formally participating in any particular program or mission. This could help improve UN effectiveness while increasing international support for AFRICOM. Third, Africa Command should request a permanent AU presence at AFRICOM headquarters to improve coordination, bolster AU credibility, and strengthen the command's legitimacy in the eyes of Africans. Fourth, Africa Command should meaningfully engage all the countries of Africa, not just those generating media coverage, with special attention paid to those in which the United States does not maintain an embassy, including Guinea-Bissau, Seychelles, Comoros, and São Tomé and Príncipe.¹²⁸ Since traditionally U.S. diplomatic engagement in Africa has been highly selective, more broadly based engagement could help alleviate lingering concerns over U.S. intentions and prior self-serving policies.¹²⁹ Fifth, Africa Command should proactively engage—and attempt to work with—other countries expanding their presence in Africa, including India, Russia, and Brazil, to foster their stable, efficient integration while attempting to prevent future sources of conflict. Finally, Africa Command should indicate its receptiveness to working with China if and when China decides to do so. Positive Chinese relationships with the U.S. Coast Guard and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development could allow these organizations to serve as conduits by which AFRICOM could engage China and eventually help build upon the very limited collaboration demonstrated in Liberia, Ethiopia, and the Gulf of Aden.¹³⁰

In addition, Africa Command can mobilize interagency support for African efforts to improve economic and political governance, such as the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development, the African Peer Review Mechanism, and the West African Civil Society Forum.¹³¹ AFRICOM should proactively assist in the implementation of recommendations from these civil organizations wherever possible—without attempting to insert itself into the decision-making process. Promotion of such governance initiatives would serve the dual purpose of promoting long-term social and political stability while simultaneously countering the effect of Chinese support for authoritarian or corrupt regimes.

Another crucial area of African need is medical care. AIDS is a major focus of the South African Development Community, and AIDS and infectious diseases have been identified by Africans in polls as the “leading global threat.”¹³² There are an estimated twenty-five million HIV-infected people in Africa, representing 7.5 percent of fifteen-to-forty-nine-year-olds.¹³³ The majority of those dying from HIV-related diseases are “between 20 and 50 years of age, the most important group for a well-functioning economy, polity and society.”¹³⁴ A conservative estimate places economic losses from HIV/AIDS at 2.6 percent of gross domestic product annually.¹³⁵ The greatest mortality, however, is from malaria, which kills an average of three thousand Africans every day.¹³⁶ AFRICOM would be well advised to redouble the efforts of military medical teams and interagency groups to address these issues. Simply making inexpensive family-planning options widely available could help limit the spread of HIV/AIDS while simultaneously contributing to controlling population growth and eventually eliminating the youth bulge.¹³⁷ This assistance would be particularly appreciated in the region if anticipated economic and demographic changes in China curtail the future availability of that nation’s medical teams.¹³⁸

These represent only a few examples of innumerable pressing African needs that can be at least partially addressed by Africa Command. The specific needs themselves, however, are not as important as the fact that AFRICOM would be advancing the common long-term objective of stability and security in Africa by responding to Africa’s needs instead of narrowly promoting a U.S. agenda. By approaching our common objective from the African perspective vice our own, we demonstrate our goodwill toward the region and ultimately encourage the states and organizations of Africa to prefer the United States to China as a partner.

The fact that a stable and secure African environment is in the long-term best interest of the United States, Africa, and China means that AFRICOM can enhance U.S. influence in Africa while promoting U.S. objectives by actively supporting *African* interests, including those that involve Chinese economic development activities. Consequently, Africa Command should support productive, responsible behavior on the part of China in Africa, taking care neither to impede nor co-opt Chinese endeavors that further long-term American objectives in Africa.

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